

# Communication is the cause of many issues in the workplace

By Andy Taylor,  
AiTraining Consultancy

**C**ommunication is the cause of many issues in the workplace - or rather the lack of communication. Bad communication leads to arguments, misunderstandings, errors and time wasted trying to determine the way forward.

The lack of communication can have an impact on

- Health and Safety
- Equality and Diversity
- Performance
- Employee engagement
- Employee loyalty
- Change management

Communicating Health and Safety policy to your employees is a legal requirement and a requirement under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. Health and Safety matters need to be communicated effectively in order to avoid accidents at work. If an accident has taken place in the workplace it needs to be communicated in order for it to be investigated so that similar or more severe accidents do not happen in the future. By law any accidents that result in an absence of 3 or more days - that is, an employee is absent or is unable to perform their normal day to day tasks for a period of 3 or more consecutive days, major injury, injuries to members of the public, loss of consciousness or death must be reported to the Health and Safety Executive ([HSE](#)) as soon as possible after its occurrence or a fine will be levied. This falls under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (1995) (RIDDOR)

**Communicating Health and Safety policy to your employees is a legal requirement and a requirement under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.**

Failure to communicate your policy on Equality and Diversity could lead to instances of bullying and harassment that would leave you open, as an organisation to Employee Tribunals or prosecution under civil law.

If your employees do not receive an adequate induction when they join your organisation where the policies are made clear and their duties are provided - which is also a legal requirement - then performance issues will arise. If employees are not informed and communicated to they will not be engaged and then their loyalty will be questioned.



The biggest failure of Change Management is the lack of communication. Getting people to understand why the change is happening is the biggest hurdle to them accepting it.

The biggest change to communicate effectively is redundancy. Redundancy is one change that affects everyone in an organisation whether you are being made redundant or not. Even if the redundancy taking place is being done on a voluntary basis, the communication still needs to be clear and easy to understand.

So why is communication in the work place so difficult? Is it a lack of understanding ourselves of what needs to and is happening?

### How to improve our communication

Improving our communication can be an easy task if we want it to. First we must identify how we communicate and the first step here is to listen to those that we communicate with. This means Actively listening to what is being said not just to the words that are being used but, how it is being said and why. [Professor Albert Mehrabian](#) has carried out much research in the field of body language and non-verbal communications. His most famous model, and one that is frequently quoted and often inaccurately is that communication is made up of

- 7% of meaning in the words that are spoken.
- 38% of meaning is paralinguistic (the way that the words are said).
- 55% of meaning is in facial expression.

Source: [www.businessballs.com](http://www.businessballs.com)

This is the simplified version. Mehrabian's research stated that these figures were pertaining to feelings and attitudes in each area. When we actively listen we need to be aware of all three areas when the communication is verbal and face to face. When we communicate with another medium, Telephone, written, email etc, this model then becomes unreliable.

By listening to who we communicate with we are able to understand if our message has got across. If it has not then our verbalising of it needs work to make it clearer. The fewer questions that are asked can mean that the message is understood or that they were not listening in the first place!

When the communication is written, there is more reliance on the words used and their interpreted meaning by the reader. Written communications need to be thought through carefully and the words used, used wisely. Reading English does depend on your frame of mind when reading it. The same sentence read in three different frames of mind, anger, upset or happy will have three completely different meanings. The written message will not have changed, only your state of mind.

Staying with that theme, email is a fast and sometimes efficient way of communicating with many people at the same time. How many of us have received an email and been enraged with it's content and fired off a reply only to regret it when the message is read again at a later time or date? The message has not changed, just our state of mind.

Communicating on the telephone is slightly easier as you can respond with questions if the message received touches a nerve to clarify understanding. Without the visual cues,

communication gets harder. VOIP, Voice Over Internet Protocol, services such as Skype, Windows Messenger and others offer video calls. This provides us with the three areas and Mahbrabian's model comes into play.

If we are able to say confidently that our communication is good - and be honest with yourself here, most of us could improve in some area! Then we need to try and understand how the other person communicates.

There are various models of how we communicate around, for example

- NLP (Neuro Linguistic Programming)
- Transactional Analysis

[NLP](#) was created in the 1970s by Richard Bandler and Dr John Grinder. It was developed to study the world's greatest therapists - Dr Milton Erickson, father of modern hypnotherapy; Fritz Perls, creator of Gestalt therapy; and Virginia Satir, the mother of modern-day family therapy. They wanted to discover what made these therapists effective<sup>1</sup>. What they came up with was NLP. An explanation of what NLP was provided by Richard Bandler - *'NLP is an attitude and a methodology, which leave behind a trail of techniques.'* And Dr John Grinder, *'NLP is an accelerated learning strategy for the detection and utilization of patterns in the world.'*

Within NLP three communication styles are described, these are

- Visual
- Auditory
- Kinaesthetic

A person that communicates visually, use pictures and images to describe something and uses phrases such as, 'I see where you are coming from' or, 'The way I *picture* it'.

A person that communicates auditory - uses sound - to describe something uses phrases like, 'It *sounds* like...' or, 'I *hear* what you are saying'. They will also have an internal voice and usually rehearse conversations before having them.

A person that communicates kinaesthetically uses feelings and gut feel to describe something and usually uses phrases like, 'I *feel* that...' or, 'That doesn't sit well with me'.

***'NLP is an attitude and a methodology, which leave behind a trail of techniques.'* - Richard Bandler.**

[Transactional Analysis](#) was developed by Eric Berne in the 1950s. Berne describes three communication states Parent, Adult and Child. These states are within us all as we have all have had an authority figure growing up (Parent), we are adults and we have all been children.

In the model there are different states within Parent and Child. A Parent will either be nurturing or domineering. A Child will either be adapted (positively or negatively) or free (creative, mischievous, free thinking). An Adult is level headed and calm.

---

<sup>1</sup> Source: [www.businessbalss.com](http://www.businessbalss.com)

Neither of the communication styles in NLP or Transactional Analysis is right or wrong and we will use all of them at some point. We have a style that is stronger than all the others and this will be our preferred communication style.

When using Transactional Analysis, the ideal state for effective communication is Adult to Adult as this is the most productive. The goal of Transactional Analysis is to leave a transaction (conversation) in the state of 'I'm OK, You're OK' and this is only achieved in an Adult to Adult transaction.

When you understand how another person communicates, especially in NLP, you are able to mirror (copy) their communication style and communicate more effectively with them. In Transactional Analysis you want to get the other person to the Adult state - as long as that is where you are! - for effective communication.

When you are being communicated to, ask questions to clarify what is being said and if the communication is not clear make the other person work a bit harder to explain what it is they mean. We can all help each other with our communication skills and this can only improve the way messages are delivered and received.

---

AiTraining Consultancy offers a ½ day in-house course on communication for 4 to 12 delegates. For more information on this course and other courses that AiTraining Consultancy offers visit our website at [www.aitraining.net](http://www.aitraining.net) or email [andy@aitraining.net](mailto:andy@aitraining.net) or call +44 (0) 203 286 5165.